

Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services          <b>CHILD CARE</b>	Section:
	<b>Best Beginnings Quality Child Care Initiatives</b>
	Subject: <b>Star Quality Program</b>

**Supersedes:** Section 7.1 (05/01/05)

**References:** 52-2-701 - 704 & 52-2-711 - 713 MCA  
Sections 37.80.101-103, 37.80.201-202, 37.80.205-206, 37.80.301-302, 37.80.305 -306, 37.80.315-316, 37.80.501 37.95.620 ARM 45 CFR Part 98.20 – 47

**Background  
Information**

In November of 1999, the Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council requested that the State of Montana investigate the feasibility of creating and implementing a tiered system of reimbursement in order to pay a higher rate for child care providers who offer higher quality care. Four primary goals for the tiered reimbursement program were identified:

1. To improve the quality of care available to all Montana children.
2. To reward high quality care with higher compensation.
3. To provide information to parents about the basic level of quality they can expect.
4. To increase the supply of high quality providers willing to serve children receiving “Best Beginnings” scholarship assistance.

This program is intended to provide fair and equitable reimbursement rates to child care providers participating in the state’s Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship program, while ensuring higher quality child care services for all children and families in Montana.

Montana’s design has evolved through studying nationally recognized best practices and by incorporating input from local child care specialists and other interested individuals. Montana has chosen a three-level program that accommodates an intermediate step in quality improvement. Level one consists of facilities that are in compliance with state of Montana Licensing Regulations, level two (one-star) consists of facilities that meet the requirements for a two or three year extended license, that comply with quality indicators in the area of staff training, staff turnover, parent involvement, and child development and level three (two-star) consists of facilities that meet the requirements for a two or three year extended license and are accredited by

Montana Department of  
Public Health & Human Services

Section:

**Best Beginnings Quality Child Care Initiatives**

**CHILD CARE**

Subject:

**Star Quality Program**

NAEYC, NAFCC or NAA.

After implementing a tiered system of reimbursement for three years Montana has realized that this system causes inequity between facilities that serve Best Beginnings Scholarship children and facilities that serve fewer children. Using the star rating as a marketing tool parents should view the star as a quality rating versus seeing stars as programs that serve low-income children. After review, the Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council requested the State of Montana refer to this program as the Star Quality Program not as a tiered reimbursement program.

**Primary  
Caregiver  
Definition**

To participate in the Star Quality Program all primary child care providers must comply with licensing and registration requirements. A primary caregiver must be at least 18 years of age and shall meet all of the following qualifications:

- (a) verify that they have received a minimum of at least eight hours of continuing education annually provided by the department or other professional child care education and development programs of national, state or local child care organizations, or college course work in early childhood areas, or child development. Continuing education must relate to the Montana early care and education knowledge base;
- (b) two years experience as a licensed or registered group or family day care home provider or day care center staff person or hold a bachelor of arts or an associate degree in education or a related field;
- (b) hold a current course completion card in infant, child and adult CPR and infant choking response; and
- (c) be currently certified in standard first aid.

For Star Quality purposes, a primary child care provider must in addition do the following in order to ensure quality:

- ☐ Every individual child has a primary caregiver assigned to them for a significant portion of the time the child is in attendance;
- ☐ Assess and provide care and education services for each child based on the child's strengths, interests and needs;
- ☐ Assess and incorporate elements of each family's culture, goals and

☐ Work, on a regular basis, with the families and other child care program staff in planning for the child.

**NAEYC / Accreditation by the National Association of Early Childhood Programs:**

1. **Self-Study** – program personnel and parents conduct a self-study to determine how well the program meets the Academy’s criteria, make needed improvements, and report to compliance with the criteria on the Program Description form provided by the Academy.
2. **Validation** – trained validators make an on-site visit to verify the accuracy of the Program Description.
3. **Accreditation Decision** – A three-person Commission considers the validated Program Description and makes the accreditation decision based on professional judgment. Programs are not required to demonstrate 100% compliance.

1. The **application fee** is paid to initiate the process and to receive the self-study materials. This fee is determined by the total number of children enrolled regardless of whether they attend on a half-day or full-day basis. For this fee, the program receives the self-study materials including multiple copies of the Observation form and staff and Parent Questionnaires.
2. The **validation fee** is paid if based on the results of the self-study and the program decides to pursue accreditation. The largest number of children attending on a given day determines this fee. For this fee, the program receives an on-site visit and the accreditation decision.

Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services          <b>CHILD CARE</b>	Section: <b>Best Beginnings Quality Child Care Initiatives</b>  Subject: <b>Star Quality Program</b>
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**For more information on NAEYC Accreditation contact:**

National Academy of Early Childhood Programs  
NAEYC  
1509 16<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036-1426  
(202) 232-8777 ext. 360 or 1-800-424-2460  
FAX 202-328-1846  
Web page: <http://www.naeyc.org/>

**NAFCC  
Accreditation**

**NAFCC -National Association for Family Child Care  
Accreditation:**

The National Association for Family Child Care is the national professional membership organization for child care providers who work in their own homes. NAFCC, chartered in 1982, established the first national family child care accreditation in 1988. Accreditation is intended for those providers who meet the child care standards defined by state licensing and registration agencies and who have demonstrated a commitment to reach beyond these minimum requirements to achieve professional standards of excellence. The accreditation process involves the provider, parents, and a NAFCC representative in a comprehensive study of the child care home.

**For more information on NAFCC Accreditation contact:**

NAFCC  
1-800-359-4381  
Web page: [www.nafcc.org](http://www.nafcc.org)

**NAA  
Accreditation**

The National After School Association (NAA) program Improvement and Accreditation System consists of the following 3 steps:

1. Purchase the NAA Standards for Quality School-Age Care – this is the

Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services          <b>CHILD CARE</b>	Section:
	<b>Best Beginnings Quality Child Care Initiatives</b>
	Subject: <b>Star Quality Program</b>

process of reviewing the standards and discussing how your program is doing and focusing on targeted improvements.

2. Purchase the self-study and accreditation kit- this self-study you do cooperatively with your families, children and staff. Summarize the information, set goals for improvement, and take action on these goals.
3. Apply for NAA accreditation and pay an endorsement visit fee – submit your self-study summary and program description, two NAA endorsers visit your program, and your program is accredited if the ratings meet the criteria for accreditation. The report that you receive identifies your program strengths and areas for continued improvement.

**For more information on NAA Accreditation contact:**

The National After School-Association  
529 Main Street Suite 214  
Charlston, MA 02129  
800.617.8242 or 617.778.6020  
FAX 617.778.6025

Web: [www.naaweb.org](http://www.naaweb.org)

**Rate Structure** In setting these rates, the Department looked at anticipated service levels by CCR&R district and by state paid provider rates. The recommended funding mechanism was to utilize a percentage rate above the provider rates, in both the hourly and daily rate categories. See “Provider Rates,” section 1-4 of this manual.

One-Star provider rates are increased 10% above the base rate.  
Two-Star provider rates are increased 15% above the base rate.

**One-Star Facility** Facilities eligible for a one-star rated registration/license are those that have been granted a two or three year extended license by their QAD Child Care

Montana Department of  
Public Health & Human Services

## CHILD CARE

Section:

**Best Beginnings Quality Child Care Initiatives**

Subject:

**Star Quality Program**

licensor. These providers apply for a one-star rating by completing an application that provides the Department with information about five quality indicators.

1. Staff training – facilities need to document on an annual basis (copies of Montana Early Care and Education Practitioner Registry certificates submitted with application) that at least 75% (for centers) 50% (for family and group homes) of the staff (primary caregivers), is at or above Level 2 on the Montana Early Care and Education Practitioner Registry.
  - Family home providers would have to be on the Montana Early Care and Education Practitioner Registry at Level 2 or higher.
2. Primary caregivers – The application will require facilities to document how each primary caregiver meets the quality definition of a primary caregiver as stated above.
3. Facility's Developmental Plan –The application will include a check off process to show whether the provider is working towards quality indicators for accreditation in meeting the developmental needs of the children in care. The check off list will address the physical, social-emotional, cognitive and creative domains.
4. Parental Involvement Plan –The application will include a check off process that will determine whether the facility is working towards meeting parental involvement quality indicators for accreditation. These quality indicators include:
  - Facility's pre-enrollment policy
  - Parent-teacher conferences
  - Parent involvement/communication techniques
5. Personnel Policies - The application will include a check off process that will determine whether the facility is working towards meeting personnel policy quality indicators for accreditation. These quality indicators include:
  - Written job descriptions that assign responsibilities
  - Staff understanding of program requirements
  - Professional development for staff and how it is tied to compensation; a salary schedule is submitted.

Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services          <b>CHILD CARE</b>	Section: <b>Best Beginnings Quality Child Care Initiatives</b>
	Subject: <b>Star Quality Program</b>

QAD extended licensing visits must be unannounced, as required by law and good licensing practice. A provider may call a child care licensor and request an extended license/registration visit. The QAD licensor will log the request and schedule a visit on their calendar. This will occur 1-2 months before renewal. However, the licensor will not tell the provider when the visit is scheduled.

Applications and renewals for one-star facilities will be handled through the Early Childhood Services Bureau.. Although these facilities have two or three year licenses, there are annual requirements that must be met both for licensing and reimbursement reasons. Annual turnover rates and primary caregiver (as defined for the Star Quality Program) data will be monitored through the CCUBS (Child Care under the Big Sky) computer system. If turnover rate of primary caregiving staff is above 50% for a one-star, providers may be asked for justification of turnover. Lower turnover of primary caregiving staff should be an outcome of the Star Quality Program.

Facilities would be asked to submit information needed for their star level prior to the expiration of their star rating (facilities will be notified with a written notice six weeks prior to their expiration date) to the Early Childhood Services Bureau:

Linda Kjorstad  
DPHHS Early Childhood Services Bureau  
PO Box 202925  
Helena, MT 59620-2925  
(406) 657-2067  
FAX: (406) 657-2055

**Two-Star  
Facility**

Facilities eligible for a two-star rated registration/license are those that have been granted a two or three year extended license by their QAD Child Care licensor and are accredited. Montana will recognize the following

Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services   <b>CHILD CARE</b>	Section: <b>Best Beginnings Quality Child Care Initiatives</b>
	Subject: <b>Star Quality Program</b>

accreditations:

1. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
2. National Afterschool Association (NAA)
3. National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC)

Centers and school age care facilities that have achieved accreditation by either NAEYC or NAA and meet the quality definition for primary caregivers (as stated above) would be assigned a two-star license.

Group and family homes would have to have one full-time primary caregiver (as defined for the Star Quality Program) on the Montana Early Care and Education Career Development Practitioner Registry at a Level 3 or higher in addition to their NAFCC accreditation, in order to receive a two-star rating on their registration.

In order for a facility to apply for a two-star status they must possess a two or three year extended registration/license and submit a short application form with proof of accreditation and copies of Montana Early Care and Education Practitioner Registry at a Level 3 or higher to the Early Childhood Services Bureau. The application will require facilities to document how each primary caregiver meets the quality definition of a primary caregiver as stated above. Facilities annual turnover rate data will be monitored through the CCUBS (Child Care under the Big Sky) computer system. If turnover rate of primary caregiving staff is above 40% for a two-star, providers may be asked for justification of turnover. Providers will be asked to submit information needed for their star level prior to the expiration of their star rating to the Early Childhood Services Bureau. Facilities will be notified with a written notice six weeks prior to their expiration date.

**Termination/  
Reduction of a  
Star Rating**

A star rating may be terminated for the following:

1. A QAD Child Care Licensors reduces the facility's two or three year extended registration/license back to a one-year registration/license. CCUBS will issue a notice of change in level status to the facility.



Montana Department of  
Public Health & Human Services

Section:

**Best Beginnings Quality Child Care Initiatives**

**CHILD CARE**

Subject:

**Star Quality Program**

2. The facility's accreditation is not renewed or is revoked. CCUBS will issue a notice of change in level status to the facility.
3. The facility's primary caregiving staff does not meet the Star Quality definition of a primary caregiver as stated above.
4. The facility is not operational.
5. A licensed or registered child care provider will lose eligibility to participate in the Star Quality Program if the provider has been disqualified from participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) for cause.

Changes in a facility's star rating level status decreasing the reimbursement payment will be effective the first day of the month following the change in CCUBS.

